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ABSTRACT

In their roles as writers, editors, and photographers for community newspapers, women helped to record the economic, social, and political fluctuations that comprise the past. In villages and towns, however, the boundaries of and limits on acceptable female activity were as strong as they were in the cities. Women in community newspapers may have been driven less by career goals and more by family circumstances in their pursuit of the news and, as a result, the women in rural journalism may have been more traditional in their views of their own roles and in their professional expectations than were their metropolitan counterparts, and thus less likely to question the authority and control of their male employers. When the Continental Congress arranged for the first official printing of the Declaration of Independence in 1777, it picked a woman, Mary Katherine Goddard, to do the job. Since that time, women's participation in journalism has crested and receded on the tide of social events: industrialization and the rise of mass advertising, the Civil War, women's increased access to education, suffrage, the World Wars, and the explosion of feminism in the 1960s. Each had its effect on society's attitudes toward women in general, and toward women's employment in particular. Four Wisconsin community newswomen are specifically described, and all four expressed the sentiments of the majority of women interviewed for this report; that is, that they considered themselves of inferior status and authority when compared to their male employers and did not question or challenge such secondary status. These findings suggest that--contrary to the literature on women's history in journalism--women in the community press may have been more traditional and less questioning of the status quo than their metropolitan counterparts. (SRT)

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WOMEN IN WISCONSIN'S COUNTRY NEWSROOMS:

TRADITION AT WORK

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WOMEN IN WISCONSIN'S COUNTRY NEWSROOMS:

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The difficulty in studying the history of women is that, for the most part, it is the history of millions of private lives, scattered and buried in the pages of personal journals and letters if it is recorded at all. Social attitudes about women throughout the past are apparent in the laws that were enforced, the religious beliefs and rituals that were honored, and the social practices that structured human behavior. But it is only during the push for suffrage in the early decades of the 20th century that women in great numbers stepped forward from anonymity into the arena from which events make their way into the public record.[1] With the exception of that period, women's history can be found largely in collections of "famous names," in short biographies of a selective few who had the courage, the means, and the good fortune to overcome the tenets of their time and to become successful--or controversial--in what was surely a society controlled by men. While the lives of these women shed light on one facet of American history, it is in the telling of the untold tales of the lives of common women that a true understanding of women's history lies.

Similarly, the history of women in journalism suffers from the "famous name" limitation; while such celebrities as Anne Royall, Nelly Bly and Ishbel Ross merit study, accounts of their accomplishments are no more than a selective discussion of the extraordinary. Such biographies should not be considered representative of the lives of women who worked in American newsrooms any more than the legendary William Randolph Hearst should be seen as typical of the newsmen of his day. Yet the

majority of women's histories limit their discussions to the lives of the famous few. A record of the lives of common women remains largely unavailable.[2] Among these women are the rural journalists who reported the daily events of a thousand communities throughout the country. In their roles as writers, editors and photographers, women helped to record the economic, social and political fluctuations that comprise the past. It is in the back issues of a community's newspaper that one finds its history; women helped to write--and shape--those histories. It is in an examination of the role women played in community journalism--and not in recalling Elizabeth Cochrane's trip around the world--that we can understand women's history in the press.

Scholarship in the area is scarce. Most of the newswomen who recorded their experiences in published sources worked for metropolitan newspapers.[3] Those works that do mention community newspapers in their discussion of women in journalism tend toward sweeping generalizations based on scant evidence. Ishbel Ross, herself an acclaimed metropolitan journalist, wrote in 1936:

> Nowhere is the newspaper woman more active than in country journalism. In plenty of small communities, she practically raises her babies in the wastepaper basket, cooks rice pudding to the friendly thud of the linotype or chronicles the town doings from a cracker-box stance. Quite often she owns her paper by inheritance from a husband or a father .... There are more than 300 women editors in the country. This does not include the large group of women who help their husbands get out papers. The jointly run newspaper is no phenomenon in the country town.[4]

Madelon Golden Schilpp and Sharon Murphy reiterated Ross' ideas in their history of women journalists published in 1983:

> Until comparatively recent times, women found their most pervasive role in the service of the little sheets that sprang up in country seats[5] ... For two or three

> generations, at the end of the horse and buggy era, mom and pop weeklies in crossroads, hamlets, backwoods county seats represented a large proportion of the newspaper titles entered with the United States Post Office Department.[6]

Such observations may be accurate. But Ross also wrote:

> The country newspaperwoman has a freedom of expression denied the metropolitan reporter. She can push a local cause, mix freely in political fights, write what she likes and continue at her job until she is 80 years of age, if her eyesight is good and she so desires.[7]

Describing the lifestyle and role of a community newspaperwoman who worked in Wichita, Kansas, Ross wrote:

> Her speech gave a vivid picture of the women who work on terms of absolute equality with newspapermen in small communities. There is never any question of sex discrimination in the field of country journalism.[8]

Bulletins from the University of Wisconsin published in 1944 and from the U.S. Women's Bureau released in 1956 concurred that weekly newspapers offered greater job opportunities, more autonomy, and increased responsibilities for talented women reporters and editors.[9]

Interviews with women who worked in Wisconsin's weekly press between 1920 and 1960 suggest that such generalizations are untrue. Women who worked in community newspapers may, in fact, have been more traditional than their metropolitan counterparts and more tightly tied to the stringent social strictures of the local status quo than were those women who braved male prejudices in the city newsroom. While women in the country may have been allowed to report what were in the city considered "male" stories, such opportunity was very likely created by a

shortage of manpower and not because country editors were any less traditional in their views about women's abilities. In most cases, the boundaries of and limits on acceptable female activity were as strong--and as much in evidence--in the villages and towns as they were in the cities.

In addition, rural women may have had different reasons for working as journalists than did their city sisters. Most women who found themselves in rural newsrooms were there by accident of marriage or birth. They worked for economic--and not political--reasons; newspapering was a family affair, with husband, wife and children pitching in to report, write, edit, print and distribute the news. Their bosses, then, were their husbands and their fathers, and they escaped to a large degree the inherent distrust of women that metropolitan newswomen faced.[10] During the shortage of manpower during World War II, for example, a Saturday Evening Post article reported:

> The ancient prejudice still holds firm. Managing city editors are suffering the dames under protest; chivalry impels them to throw the ladies a few words of good cheer and encouragement, but candor compels them to admit that they will take a dumb man of erratic social habits over a smart gal every time.[11]

While community newswomen may have escaped such derogation, they also were less likely to be the sort of women willing to forebear such abuse in the pursuit of a career. Instead, evidence shows that many newswomen in Wisconsin weeklies between 1920 and 1960 married into newspapers, worked for--and not as equal partners with--their husbands, and exercised little, if any, editorial control.[12] They were, in many cases, no more than long-term employees who wrote and edited all the

news but that traditionally reserved for the men: the city council, the police stories and the editorials. While many women wrote weekly columns (under such flags as "Susie's Mommy Says," or "In Style"), all but one of the 16 women interviewed reported that they submitted their work to their husbands for final approval. In short, women in community newspapers may have been driven less by career goals and more by family circumstances in their pursuit of the news. As a result, the women in rural journalism may have been more traditional in their views of their own roles and in their professional expectations than were their metropolitan counterparts, and thus less likely to question the authority and control of their male employers.[13]

The remainder of this work is divided into two sections: a brief overview of women's history in the press, and a discussion of the role women played in Wisconsin weekly newspapers from 1920 to 1960. The first section is essential in understanding the second: based on secondary sources, it provides an historical framework from which to discuss the individual lives of the women introduced later in the work. The second section discusses women in Wisconsin newsrooms and includes four case studies of women who worked in the Wisconsin community press. Although a total of sixteen Wisconsin newswomen were interviewed for this study, the experiences and views of these four were selected as generally representative of the sample. Of the total 16, each worked for more than 10 years at a community newspaper and each was asked to discuss her role, her authority and her experiences in the newsroom. Although it is impossible to generalize from the individual experiences of so few women, the perceptions of these 16 women about their roles and responsibilities were remarkably similar: without exception, they considered themselves of inferior status and authority when compared to their male employers--and, again without exception,

they did not question or challenge such secondary status. These findings suggest that--contrary to the literature on women's history in journalism--women in the community press may have been more traditional and less questioning of the status quo than their metropolitan counterparts.

Women in the Newsroom: A Brief Historical Overview

When the Continental Congress arranged for the first official printing of the Declaration of Independence in 1777, it picked a woman, Mary Katherine Goddard of Baltimore, to do the job.[14] Mrs. Goddard was by no means unique; men often had younger wives who outlived them to inherit the family printing business.[15] About 30 women are known to have been colonial printers or newspaper publishers; of the 30, six served as official printers for colonial governments, one worked for a city government, and 16 published newspapers, pamphlets and tracts.[16]

Since that time, women's participation in journalism has crested and receded on the tide of social events: industrialization and the rise of mass advertising, the Civil War, women's increased access to education, suffrage, the World Wars, and the explosion of feminism in the 1960s. Each had its effect on society's attitudes toward women in general, and toward women's employment in particular.

The Civil War was the first of many wars that opened doors for women journalists. For the first time, the era of the Civil War saw women allowed into the sacrosanct chambers of the Washington Capitol Press Gallery.[17] Some women, responding to the hostility shown them by their male colleagues, stayed away from the press gallery even after its doors were open to them. Among them were Sara Jane Clarke, Washington's second female newspaper correspondent, who arrived in the capital in June 1850 to write for the Saturday Evening Post, and Mary Abigail Dodge.

Rather than meet her interview subjects in the press gallery, Dodge invited the leading abolitionists of the day to the home of her editor, where she was also the governess to his six children.[18]

Other women were more insistent upon taking their rightful place among the men in the press gallery. The names of the women eligible for the galleries were first listed in the Congressional Directory in 1870.[19] There were four, but within nine years that number had climbed to 20, about 12 percent of the total 166 correspondents. In 1879, the Standing Committee of Correspondents--the ruling press organization in Washington--enacted a rule change designed to control membership in the press corps. It limited each newspaper to three capitol correspondents and barred part-time writers from the galleries. Because women worked on space or as part-time journalists, the rule change effectively established the capitol press gallery as a male domain once more. Within two years, women correspondents had, for the most part, been relegated to society and gossip news in lieu of political coverage--and, for all practical purposes, had been excluded from the ranks of "bona fide" Washington journalists.[20]

Despite the limitations and restrictions enforced by men, women continued to join the journalistic ranks. In 1870, the first year the U.S. Census listed journalists by sex, 35 of 5,286 editors and reporters were women; by 1900, 2,193 of 30,098 were women,[21] and by 1920, 5,730 or 16.7 percent of all reporters and editors, were women.[22]

As their numbers increased, so, too, did the pressures they faced on the job. Flora McDonald, an established journalist of the 1880s, wrote in an 1889 issue of The Journalist:

> The girl who has it in her to survive newspeper work will cry the first time a man swears at her, grate her teeth the second time, and swear back the third time.[23]

In the same article, McDonald stated with conviction that, in spite of their success, "women reporters cannot hope to be treated equally with men."[24]

It was not until the suffrage movement of the early 1900s that women truly became front-page reporters.[25] "Stunt girls" such as Nelly Bly wrote their way onto the front page and into the ranks of the top newspaper reporters of the day. But women were making headway into the community newsroom as well. As mass marketing invaded the American economy, newspaper publishers recognized homemakers as an important audience for their advertisers--and what better way to attract female readers than with women writers? Thus the demand for women specialty writers created a new category of journalists, one comprised exclusively of women: the sob sisters.

Social upheavals triggered by two World Wars contributed to increased opportunities for women journalists. World War I led to a liberalization of social attitudes about women's abilities and role in the workplace, but 20 months was too short a time to establish any permanent transformation.[26] On the heels of the post-war optimism of the 1920s came the Great Depression, quashing any hopes for equal employment opportunities women may have harbored during the decade. The percentage of newswomen, for example, showed the least gain of the century during the decade beteen 1930 and 1940.[27] The Depression put many women out of work and intensified social pressures to reserve all available jobs for male breadwinners.[28] Many state and local governments refused to hire married women, and several state legislature considered bills to prohibit employment of wives in the private sector as

well.[29]

A shortage of male labor during World War II, however, prompted women to leave their homes to go to work in the nation's offices, factories, shops--and newsrooms. In 1940, six of seven married women were full-time housewives; during the war, 20 million of them--7 million of whom had never worked before--entered the labor force.[30] The shift to women in editorial positions began on small newspapers and then spread to metropolitan dailies of the far West and Midwest before it became customary on large dailies throughout the country.[31] Editor and Publisher estimated that more than 8,000 male reporters were replaced by women during the war.[32] An article in the Saturday Evening Post reported:

> City rooms all over the land have come to resemble a girls' boarding school study hall . . . The war has crumpled old, formidable barriers against women in the newspaper business, thereby confirming the morbid suspicions of editors that it is not man's destiny to be happy. Dozens of small dailies and weeklies are staffed by females exclusively; a male addition to a paper has become such a rarity that Editor and Publisher ran in October the following headline: "Man Joins Staff."[33]

Even in the face of such labor shortages, many editors hired women with reluctance. One publisher wrote:

> We have long exhausted our waiting list of prospective employees; we have impressed women employees and others available in our community. We have about reached the bottom of the barrel.[34]

Nevertheless, women were hired to cover stories previously reserved only for men. The first female sportswriter for the Daily Illini told a meeting of newswomen that "There simply was no choice but to give women a chance to do things that men

had always done previously--not only on newspapers but in many other areas as well."[35]

Newspapers in Wisconsin were so desperate for womenpower that the University of Wisconsin's journalism school agreed to offer a "short course" in reporting for women who had previously had some college education.[36]

As the war drew to a close, the question of whether women would remain in the labor force became a central social issue. A survey by the Women's Bureau of 1944-45 answered the question for the workers: three of every four women interviewed said they intended to keep working after the war.[37] Nevertheless, between June and September 1945, two of four women employed had been dismissed or voluntarily left their positions in the labor market.[38] One woman explained:

> The returning vets were reclaiming their former jobs and the pressures were intense to step quietly aside. In 1946, I relinquished my Association Press job--which included sportswriting--because it just didn't occur to me that I might have had a right to resist making room for a veteran.[39]

Despite the pressures, the impact of World War II on women's employment never fully subsided. While many women did withdraw from the labor force, the proportion of women in paid employment remained well above the 1940s level.[40] A survey of 65 metropolitan newspapers in 1949, for example, showed a 38 percent increase in women staffers since before the war. Veterans who wanted their jobs were allowed to return to work, but newspapers were growing in size and circulation, and there were more jobs available for both men and women.[41] As indicated by data from the U.S. Census, the percentage of women in newsrooms increased more between 1940 and 1950 than during any other decade in recent history.[42]

Year	Total	Male	Female	% Male	% Female
1920	34,197	28,467	5,730	83.3	16.7
1930	51,844	39,920	11,924	77.0	23.0
1940	59,053	44,303	14,750	75.1	24.9
1950	89,325	60,730	28,595	67.9	32.1
1960	102,859	64,552	38,301	62.8	37.2

This is not to suggest that women were on equal footing with their male colleagues in the newsroom after World War II. Even into the 1950s, employers preferred to hire men: analysis of 1,800 editorial vacancies advertised between 1951 and 1966 showed that males were requested for nearly 25 percent of the positions, while women were requested for 5 percent.[43] The same Council on Manpower in the United States that hailed journalism as the field in which women had made the most progress during the early decades of the century tempered its enthusiasm by noting:

> Even here, however, women have been hired mainly to write and to edit the increasing volume of material dealing with fashions, homemaking, social news and other subjects prepared specifically for women readers.[44]

An employment survey conducted by Mademoiselle magazine in 1949 concluded that journalism no longer offered the opportunities to wome that it once had:

> 1949 . . . . Newspaper bent? It's a bad year for it. Four years ago, before the men came back, you could have had a crack at a beginning job, even on a big-city daily, and it might have led into the metropolitan reporting that most women aim for when they enter journalism. But the girls who started then and have been handling straight news now find themselves shifted to departments with a woman's angle and when they drop out of news jobs, they are replaced by men.[45]

During the 1950s, the question of women's place in society became a rallying

point for many women. Simultaneously, the country experienced a "baby boom" in which the birth rate for third children doubled between 1940 and 1960, and the rate for fourth children tripled during the same two decades.[46] An increasing number of women returned to the labor force after their children were enrolled in school, and studies show they did so to improve their families' standards of living and for their own personal fulfillment.[47]

Women in Wisconsin's Country Newsrooms

Women in the rural press share the common history of all women who worked in nation's newsrooms during the past eight decades. But their experiences are unique as well: Although social fluctuations that determined career opportunities for the metropolitan newswoman affected her rural counterparts as well, the country journalist's status was linked inalterably to her marital status; in short, her marriage guaranteed her job. As such, evaluation of career opportunities available to rural newswomen must consider the question of employment conditions rather than status. What role did she play in the newsroom? What news did she cover, and what was left to her husband editor? Did she have, as was suggested by Ross, absolute freedom in the causes she championed, the political positions she assumed, the editorial opinions she expressed? Was she involved in setting editorial policy? Did she encounter resistance from sources in the community? How was she viewed by her readers--male and female? Perhaps most important, what did she perceive her role to be in the newsroom? Who controlled the newspaper? The answers to questions such as these--and not anecdotaes about children playing in typeboxes while mother pounded the typewriter--provide an accurate understanding of the history of women journalists in the country press.

A starting point of a discussion of women in Wisconsin's rural press is an examination of the numbers of women who worked in the state's community newsrooms. Records are incomplete and do not include the names of those women who worked wih their husbands. Annual reports of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, for example, include only the names of women who served as sole publisher of a state newspaper for at least one year. Although this group represents a small proportion of the total number of women working in community journalism, these are the women who, according to Ross, and Schilpp and Murphy, worked in greater numbers and enjoyed greater freedoms than did their city counterparts. As a result, this data is of interest.[48] Analysis of the annual reportes between 1936 and 1950 (the World War II years, during which women's participation could have been expected to peak) shows that the percentage of women editors and publishers ranged from a low of 2.7 percent in 1938 to a high of 5.1 percent in 1940. That percentage decreased to 2.9 percent by 1950.[49] In addition, records indicate that most women who inherited newspapers from their husbands left the business within five years of their spouses' deaths. For example, of the 10 women who managed weeklies in Wisconsin in 1936, six remained in the business in 1938, five remained in 1940, and two remained in 1946. Similarly, of the 17 women who managed state weeklies in 1940, five remained in 1946. In sum, the majority of women who inherited their husbands' newspapers remained in publishing only as long as it took to find a buyer.[50]

The experiences of women who worked for their husbands in country newsrooms are far more typical--and less well documented--than those of women who managed newspapers alone. While it is true that women in small towns occasionally covered beats that traditionally were left to men, it was no more common

an occurrence in the town than it was in the city. In fact, such male strongholds as the county courthouse, the police station, city hall and the editorial page remained off limits to many country newswomen. The perception that community journalists enjoued more professional freedoms than women in city newsroom was disputed by all 16 of the newswomen interviewed for this study. They argued, instead, that traditional mores are strongest in small towns, where women face greater social pressures to remain within the well-defined limits of appropriate feminine behavior.[51] Women encountered resistance from their sources as well as from their friends and neighbors--many of whom expressed the opinion that a woman's place was in the home, not the newsroom. Nine of the 16 women maintained that metropolitan newswomen did not encounter such prejudices. Finally, six of the women interviewed exhibited a distinct lack of empathy with their female peers; four stated explicitly that they actively disliked other women and would rather spend their time with men. Seven of the 16 women interviewed voiced disdain for women's clubs and civic organizations, maintaining that such groups ostracized women who chose to work outside the home.[52]

The delineation between male and female responsibilities in rural newsrooms remained clear wherever spouses worked together. Even in cases where the males managed the printing shop and left the newspaper management to their wives, husbands regularly reviewed every article and editorial and retained final approval rights. Women often did not cover politics, police or crime news, and typically did not write editorials; they did write columns on social issues, homemaking and family life, covered the local school system, and wrote society news such as weddings and obituaries. Without exceptions, each of the 16 women interviewed expressed satisfaction with the division of labor, often responding to questions about possible

inequities with some variation of the phrase, "That's the way it was. I never thought much about it. He was the boss."[52]

The issue of women's professional news organizations found the 16 women evenly divided on the question. Some said that women's organizations are more concerned with "counting back the months to see who had a baby after only six months of marriage"[53] than with professional improvement. Others contended just as firmly that such groups as the National Federation of Presswomen provide support, training and enrichment to women in journalism. Oddly enough, 15 of the 16 women reported that they would prefer to be accepted into the men's professional organizations, and that they would rather spend their time with men.

The following case studies were selected from the total sample to provide a forum for each side of every issue covered. Where there opinions are in concert, it can be assumed that the majority of women interviewed agreed with the position represented. It is impossible to generalize from such a limited sample of subjects; the women interviewed vary greatly in background, education, experience and attitudes. There is no typical newswoman in country journalism, but the life stories of common women help provide a broader perspective and more valid understanding of women's role in the press--and may call into question some of the assumptions researchers have made about women in the country newsroom.

Marie Creviere

Peter Schulz immigrated to the United States from Baden-Baden, Germany, in the early years of the 1900s. A barber by trade, he arrived in New York and soon found a job in Brooklyn. He was satisfied with his work and awed by the size and excitement of the city, but he found that July in New York was unbearably warm. One July

afternoon, Peter Schulz inquired of one of his customers whether the entire United States suffered such severe heat; the gentleman urged him to escape the temperature by moving to Toledo, Ohio. The young barber departed within days, only to find the weather stifling and the city intolerable. Frustrated and angry, Schulz demanded of his new landlady the name of a location that enjoyed more temperate weather; she suggested he relocate to Greenleaf, Wisconsin, a berg of fewer than 1,500 citizens just south of Green Bay. Schulz acquiesced, moved to Wisconsin, and soon was married to a young secretary with whom he had three children. Marie Schulz Creviere was their second.

After attending public high school, Marie Schulz worked as a secretary in DePere, and in 1943, married her high school sweetheart, Paul Creviere. Creviere, who was partially deaf, was classified 4-F, and was one of the few men in town who was not called into service at the onset of World War II; upon insistent prompting by his father, he abandoned his engineering studies at St. Norbert's college to join the staff at the family-owned DePere Journal. Before long, Marie was pitching in at the paper as well, "doing all the things the new reporters refused to do. It was a time when all the men were gone, and there weren't very many women in the business in those days. As soon as we got a new man trained, he'd be drafted. Finally we gave up, and decided I would do the society things like the weddings and obituaries," she remembers.

Within the year, the Crevieres' first child, Susie, was born, and Marie Creviere did most of her writing at home. In 1947, her father-in-law suggested that she begin writing a homemaker's column, plugging local businesses that were having sales, promotions or special events. "If Wagners was having a sale on washing machines, I was supposed to write about their washing machines," Creviere said. "But I just

couldn't get my heart into it." Instead, she began writing "Susie's Mommy Says," a chatty gossip column that chronicled the growth of her family and of her community. She continued to write at home until the mid-1950s, when she finally went to work at the newspaper full time, leaving her three small children with a neighborhood babysitter.

In addition to her column (still called "Susie's Mommy Says," although Susie is grown with children of her own), Creviere writes all of the local news with the exception of police stories. "Paul goes down and picks those up for me," she says. She has always been paid "a good salary, the same as the men would have gotten," she says--but it is her husband who sets her wage. She has, on several occasions over the years, asked him for a raise and, on at least two of those occasions, has had that request denied. When Creviere refers to her husband in her column, she calls him "The Boss."

"He's the boss, and I work for him. He's the sole owner of this newspaper and what he says goes," she says. "I am an employee, although I do own some stock in part of the building. All of my work, but especially my columns, goes to him for approval before it goes into the paper. That's the way it's always been."

Although her neighbors never directly questioned Creviere's decision to go to work full time, she says she encountered resistance from the community on several fronts. "Oh, the women used to go sit in their little clubs and meetings and talk about how I wasn't home, taking care of my children where I belonged," she said with disdain. "I didn't let it bother me. I didn't want to belong to those groups anyway."

Creviere was exceptional among the women interviewed in that she was one of only three who regularly covered local politics, including town council meetings. "Even before I started working full time, I'd go to the meetings in the evening while

Paul stayed with the children," she said. "It was quite a barrier to break through to appear at the town council meetings when I was pregnant. I always used to wear these big hats; Paul told me that if I wore enormous hats, they'd be too busy looking at my hats to notice my tummy."

Creviere remembered one incident in the late 1950s that was typical of the sort of difficulties she encountered on the job. The town's Police and Fire Commission held a special meeting to discuss the activies of a local woman who was "running a house of ill repute. They didn't think a lady should hear about such things, so they asked me to leave the room. Finally, when I said I wanted to stay, the head of the commission said it probably wasn't anything I hadn't heard before, so they decided to let me stay," she said.

When she first began attending the annual conventions of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, women were "shuffled off" to teas and shopping sprees, Creviere reported. Eventually, she and a few other vocal newswomen insisted on remaining for the workshops and lectures and, before long, many women remained at the conference and attended its sessions alongside the men.

Although she is very active in the community and belongs to several women's social groups, Creviere refuses to join the women's press associations. "If they won't accept me in the men's group, I don't want to belong to any group," she said. "Why should I belong to an all-women's group when I belong to a profession that has both men and women? Besides, I've never been extremely fond of women. I can't stand going to play bridge and trying to figure out who had a baby after only six months. I've got better things to do; I'd much rather spend my social and professional time with men."

Dorothy Ninman

Dorothy Ninman graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Journalism in 1924 but didn't begin work in the newsroom until she married into a newspaper family in 1929. The great-granddaughter of the man who started the Cedarburg News in the 1840s, Ninman was born in Kiel, Wisconsin in 1901. After graduating from high school, she joined the Navy in 1918 ("they thought I was some kind of a freak," she remembered) and learned to type and to take shorthand while stationed in Milwaukee. In 1920, she left the service to attend journalism school at the University of Wisconsin, where half of her classmates were women. "It was a new school, relatively, and they were so anxious to keep students in the program, they'd do anything for you, even if you were a woman," she said. After graduating, however, Ninman refused to work for the $18 per week the Milwaukee Journal was offering women at the time. "I thought I was worth more than that," Ninman said, "so I took a secretarial job at $25 a week." After working for the Wisconsin Anti-Tuberculosis Society, the state Juvenile Protection Agency, and as a stringer for The Motion Picture News, Ninman worked at the Boston Store in Milwaukee for a year before marrying in 1929.

Ninman's father owned the Reedsburg Times Herald, and the newlyweds soon were employed by the newspaper. Ninman's husband, Max, earned $25 a week; she earned $4 per week--and each put in the same number of hours. The disparity between their wages continued throughout her 40 years at the newspaper, despite the fact that Max became publisher in 1948.

"I never thought about why he was making more than me, we were just glad to have both salaries," she said. "But you know, I worked harder than he did. He'd knock off about 4 o'clock every afternoon and go sit in the tavern; he said he had to

go because it was the only way to get the news. Women didn't go into taverns in those days. I did if I was looking for somebody and they happened to be in the tavern, but it wasn't considered proper. But the men spent a lot of time there, it was the social center of the community. I wouldn't have wanted to go in there if I could have; I had better ways to spend my time."

Max's mother informed her new daughter-in-law almost immediately that she disapproved of her career notions. "She didn't work and she'd tell me that I didn't belong working either, that I wasn't taking good care of Max, that I didn't bake for him like she used to. But who had time to bake?"

Ninman remained at home during what she casually referred to as her "breeding years," because it was considered indelicate for a pregnant woman to be seen in public. "One didn't appear on the streets looking ungainly, one didn't flaunt oneself," she said with sarcasm. "That was in the early 1930s; there were still a lot of Victorian ideas in play in the small towns. After three or four months, you had to stay home. I didn't think much about it at the time; that's just the way it was."

Ninman took all the photographs for the Reedsburg Times Herald, and wrote all the local news except for the city government stories, which were reserved for her husband. The paper had no editorial column, but Max set its editorial policies.

"I knew Max was the boss. It was his business and he laid down the rules. It never occurred to me that it might be mine, too . . .He directed me and I did what he told me to do. Women didn't boss men in those days, but we got our own way anyway, in little devious ways . . .but I was always an employee, I always worked for him," she said.

Women who worked outside the home in Reedsburg, Wisconsin, in the 1930s were considered oddities, vulnerable to criticism and ostracization from those women

who bowed to social pressures and tradition and remained at home. Such pressures were limited to small-town living, Ninman maintained. Women who lived in the cities and worked on metropolitan newspapers didn't have the same kinds of restrictions placed on them by the community, she said. "It all came from living in a small town, where everybody knew you and made your business their business," she said.

Gathering news was more difficult because she was a woman, Ninman said. "The police would see me at an accident or a drowning and they'd holler at me to get away from there, what did I think I was doing? They darned well knew what I was doing and why I was there. A radio reporter showed up at the scene of an accident that they wouldn't let me get near, and they let him right up in front. But he was a man."

On another occasion, Ninman was cornered by a Reedsburg city clerk in a secluded room in city hall, where he "made a pass" at her. "I had to be nice to him, I couldn't alienate him," she said. "This was a small town and he kept the records, I had to be very nice and just edge my way out of there. I went back to the office, and oh, was I mad. But Max just said it was my problem--and so it was."

While her two children still were in elementary school, the United States entered World War II. Ninman's mother lived with the family and cared for the children while she worked; when war was declared, Ninman tried to enlist in the Navy. "I would have gone to Europe, too, but they wouldn't take me. . .they said I was too old and besides, I had two kids by that time. They were old enough to stay with my mother, I'd have gone if they'd have taken me, but they said no."

Ninman never belonged to any of the press associations, nor to any of the local women's groups. "I don't like all that nonsense, I'm just not programmed for it," she said. "The Pen Women of America were around for awhile, but they weren't newspaper people; they wrote these little dramas and that icky, wishy-washy jingle

poetry. I thought I was above all that."

In 1970, Max Ninman announced he was selling the newspaper; his decision came as a complete surprise to his wife. After 41 years as the publication's principal reporter, writer and editor, Ninman said she never bothered to ask her husband why. "I supposed it was because of his health, he had emphysema. But it was his newspaper and he could sell it if he wanted to; he didn't have to ask me for permission."

Mabel Temby

When Mabel Temby was a newlywed and the proud co-owner of a bankrupt newspaper in the village of Kewaunee, Wisconsin, she had every intention of raising a family and staying home to keep house. But World War II--and a pile of debts that needed paying--intervened, and within 10 years of her first published news story, she would stand before a gathering at the University of Missouri as the national president of the National Federation of Presswomen to share the podium with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

Mabel Temby's family lived in the Kewaunee area for nine generations before she was born in 1913. She grew up on a farm just outside of the town limits, attended public school, and went to work as a secretary upon graduation. In 1935, she married C.N. Temby, a printer who had lost his right hand in a printing accident while still a teenager. She continued working until her first child was born in 1937; by then, the newlyweds had purchased the weekly newspaper in Luxemburg, Wisconsin. In 1941, Temby had her second child, and her husband was searching for another newspaper to add to his first. Before long, he came upon the Kewaunee Enterprise, circulation 900, a bankrupt weekly that he could get at a price he could afford. They bought the paper in 1942.

"We were very naive," Temby said. "The paper was bankrupt, and bankruptcy meant you paid off the debts, which we did. But that meant we had no money to live on, so my husband got a job editing a newsletter in the shipyards during World War II. That left it up to me to edit the newspaper during the war."

Childcare was unavailable--and unaffordable if it had been offered-- so Temby brought her toddlers to the newsroom with her every morning. In keeping with the myth of the country newswoman, Temby's children took their naps on slabs of newsprint and learned to spell out of the typebox.

Upon assuming editorial control, Temby's first problem was advertising--or, to be more specific, the lack of advertising. With her youngest child in tow, Temby began to make the rounds of area businesses, but with little success. "It was war time, they didn't have anything to sell," she said. Before long, she had expanded her terrain to include several surrounding towns, where professionals such as doctors and dentists began to place ads in the Enterprise. Temby was delighted--until local merchants came to call.

:The members of the Chamber of Commerce came to tell me that they didn't like the way I was running the newspaper," she said. "I wasn't supposed to take anything but local ads; I wasn't supposed to be taking ads from out of town, from businesses that competed with the local merchants. But they weren't giving me any ads, and we needed the money. I told them I was going to take all the ads I could get, from anywhere I could get them."

The merchants responded by boycotting the Enterprise, refusing for nearly a year to place any ads in the paper at all. "It was illegal for them to all agree to do that to me, but there was nothing I could do about it," Temby said. "It really hurt me for about a year, and believe me, I've never forgotten it. They did it because I was a

woman; they'd never have had the nerve to do something like that to another man. You know, a man probably would have given up and gone somewhere else that was easier but I was too stubborn. I wasn't going to let them beat me."

Temby controlled the newspaper while her husband ran the back shop. They were co-owners of the corporation that owned the newspaper, and both names appeared on the incorporation records. Still, Temby's name does not appear in the annual reports of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, although she maintained control of all aspects of the paper, including its editorial policy--even during the 12 years in which her husband served as mayor of Kewaunee.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Temby's career was her election in the early 1950s to the post of national president of the National Federation of Presswomen. Early in her career, she had attended the annual conventions of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, but "they'd always try to shuffle me off to the ladies' teas, and I'd tell them that I hadn't come for tea, I'd come to find out how to do the job I was supposed to be doing. I didn't have any experience, or background, or training in journalism, and I was putting out this newspaper; I wanted to learn how to do it. I'd come to the conventions to attend the seminars. Once I made them understand that, we got along fine."

But the Wisconsin Newspaper Association was, by and large, a man's organization. It was run by men and most of its special events--including trips and tours--were limited to participation by men. In search of women who shared her experience, Temby joined the Federation of Presswomen.

"I wanted to meet women who were doing what I was doing, to find out how they were coping," she said. "I didn't find discrimination on the job per se . . . except maybe from the salesmen. I think they resented having to deal with a woman; first

they thought they could sell me anything, and then if I decided not to buy something, it was because I was a stupid woman who didn't know what I was doing."

In 1952, Temby, who had been attending federation meetings for five years, was nominated president of the national organization. One of her opponents worked as the director of public relations for the Quaker Oats corporation; the other edited a nationally recognized encyclopedia. Temby considered herself outclassed--but her fellow presswomen recognized in her a kindred spirit. "I think the other two scared them off," she said. "They were most of them just like me, sitting out in the audience thinking, 'Well, I don't know about those other two, so I think I'll just vote for Mabel.'" During her two years as president, Temby traveled to 28 states to speak to local chapters; her down-home style soon made her a celebrity of sorts and hiked her speaking fee to $400 for a 30-minute presentation. After considering a career on the lecture circuit, Temby decided that her family came first, and returned to Kewaunee. From there, however, she was invited to attend a celebration at the University of Missouri and to share the podium with Laura Brockman, editor of Ladies Home Journal, and Eleanor Roosevelt.

"There I was, from Kewaunee, with Eleanor Roosevelt. She was a little hard of hearing, you know, so she would always look right at you when you talked. It made you feel as though you were really important, that she really cared about what you were saying, when, in fact, it was just because she was trying to read your lips," Temby said. "But it was such a thrill, to be up there on that podium with those people. When we bought that little bankrupt newspaper, I would never have believed it."

Ruth Curtiss

Ruth Thompson Curtiss is unique among the women interviewed for this study

in that she is not a native of Wisconsin. She was born in Washington, D.C. in 1919, the daughter of a schoolteacher and a professor of agricultural economics. At the time of her birth, her father was director of the Department of Rural Credits in Washington; he died during the flu epidemic of 1920, leaving his wife with three young children to raise. She took her family home to Stoughton, Wisconsin, where Ruth Thompson grew up.

Ruth earned an economics degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1939 and decided to attend law school. "The dean tried to talk me out of coming into the program," she said. "He couldn't figure out why I wanted to go to law school, this was the Depression and he couldn't understand why I would want to spend all the money to go to law school when I was just going to go out and get married anyway." Thompson was one of 10 girls in the first-year class; she finished one year before financial straits forced her to quit school and find work in a local law firm. In 1942, she married Bowden Curtiss.

Curtiss was a reporter at the Capital Times in Madison, and a news editor at WIBA radio in Madison until they were married. Three months after the wedding--with Ruth six weeks pregnant--he was drafted and sent to Europe. She didn't see him again until three years later; in the meantime, Ruth moved to Stoughton to live with her mother until the war was over.

When Curtiss returned to the United States, he took a job as a reporter for the Stoughton Courier-Hub, a local weekly. In 1948, he bought the Darlington Republican Journal and moved his pregnant wife and two small children into a Victorian mansion they rented for "next to nothing--it was falling down." Ruth began to help with the billing and office work--tasks that could be completed at home--while her children were small. It was not until her youngest started school

home--while her children were small. It was not until her youngest started school that she began to go into the newsroom on a full-time basis. She covered the "female things: weddings, obituaries and the schools," while her husband covered city hall, county government and the police beat. He wrote the editorials, but they both wrote weekly columns.

"My column covered everything, from any social issue to an experiment in baking or laundry or sewing," Curtiss said. A random sample of the topics covered in Ruth Curtiss' column over the years included raising children, a referendum to raise money for a new high school, their travels to the West Coast, and the latest fashions.

She remembers feeling frustrated and "snowed under" by the burdens of raising small children and keeping a rambling, six-bedroom house. "I used to ask myself, 'Is this what I went to college for? To be a housewife?' But I was stuck; there was no reasonable alternative."

When the Curtisses purchased the Darlington newspaper in 1948, the title listed only her husband's name. "That's the way things were done," she said. "At times I asked about it and was told that that's just the way it was." Since then, however, the Curtisses have bought two other small newspapers, and both names appear on the titles. "By then, I had convinced him it was a good idea, for tax purposes," she explained.

"It was a common attitude among men that women who stayed home didn't work," she said. "And even those of us who did work outside the home didn't get credit for the work we did. I'd resent it if, when we finally sell our newspapers, I had no control over the income or over the decisions to sell. I'd wonder what I had done all this for; why did I work all these years--for what?"

Conclusion

The four women specifically discussed in this report express the sentiments of the majority of women interviewed for this study. Although generalizations to all community newswomen cannot reasonably be made from these findings, it is possible to suggest that women in country newsrooms may have been subject to more direct, blatant pressure to conform to the small town status quo--a status quo that demanded women remain homemakers, wives and mothers. In addition, women's opportunities in the rural press may have been as expansive--or as limited-- as their husbands saw fit to make them. While they were guaranteed employment, their spouses set the boundaries and the focus of their work; as was the case with metropolitan newswomen, the role of women in the community press was defined by men. Evidence shows that the rosy picture of life as a rural newswoman painted so often in women's history literature does not withstand scrutiny: the tradition of male control in the workplace was as much entrenched in the country as it was in the city.

FOOTNOTES

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3. Ibid.

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7. Ross, Ladies of the Press, p. 464.

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10. Interviews with Marie Creviere, Ruth Curtiss, J. Huber, Marge Miley, Dorothy Ninman, Pat Reilly, Nell Shellman and Mabel Temby.

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13. Interviews.

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